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Viewpoints

The Reagan Plan for a Super Spy Agency

If the GOP ticket wins, the CIA's prospects might improve, but a Reagan intelligence white paper calls for a new service with sweeping powers. It could overshadow Bush's old outfit.

By Jeff Stein

When Ronald Reagan finally picked ex-CIA Director George Bush to be his running mate last week, I was sitting around the television with a group of Latin American exiles. "This is just like Brazil!" one exclaimed. "The head of the secret police is going to end up running the country."

It will be interesting to see just what influence the CIA will have if the Reagan-Bush ticket is elected in November. It is true that Bush was immensely liked by the cloak-and-dagger crew during his short stay at its Langley, Va., headquarters (June, 1975, to January, 1976), and he employed perhaps 40 ex-CIA officers in his campaign organization, including his own director of security, Robert Gambino. But predictions of some kind of a CIA *putsch* organized out of the vice president's office are perhaps off the mark.

For one thing, there exists a definite anti-CIA feeling among Reagan's closest foreign-policy and national-security advisers, many of whom were members of the Ford administration's "B-team," which was set up to offer competing analyses of CIA estimates of Soviet missile strength. And in lengthy conversations with Richard V. Allen, Reagan's principal adviser on these matters, I came away with the definite feeling that Allen thought the CIA was just not "tough enough" when it came to sizing up the Russians.

The principal evidence of my conclusions exists in a special white paper on the intelligence community put together by a group of ex-military and ex-CIA officers under Allen's direction last year.

While the white paper certainly expresses fondness for covert action at home and abroad—popularly known as "dirty tricks"—it also leaves an impression that the CIA may have to share the back alleys of the world with other U.S. agencies, particularly the FBI and the Pentagon, and may have to be prepared to give up some of its power to a new "intelligence czar" in the White House. All this portends, of course, a classic Washington power struggle come January if Reagan wins.

Here are the highlights of the intelligence reorganization plan:

● Domestic spying.

The plans call for maintaining joint CIA-FBI files on "counterintelligence and counter-terrorism" in a special section to be created in the Justice Department or a wholly new, independent agency. "Here," the policy paper proposes, "joint teams of officers from both the domestic and foreign intelligence services would lawfully look at the same data."

● Checks on CIA analysts.

Among Reagan's advisers, there is a congenital suspicion of Russian military analysts at the CIA. To correct that, it is proposed that the role of the Defense Intelligence Agency be strengthened as a source of "alternative analysis," and that a permanent kind of "B-team" be set up to further checkmate the CIA, similar to the "wise old men" of the defunct Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

● Shift covert action away from the CIA.

"The clandestine services have been of inestimable value to our national security," the white paper claims. "They have performed some of the most important of CIA's unique functions, and they should be strengthened."

But the Reagan team doesn't think the CIA can do the job and wants to create a brand new "Foreign Operations Service" that would bring under one roof both information-collection and counterintelligence activities. As a new intelligence superagency combining many functions of both the FBI and CIA, the FOS would actually be a mirror image of the dreaded Soviet KGB. It would, the plan proposes, be "wholly clandestine."

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• White House control.

The Reagan team would like to create the position of the president's "Chief Adviser for Intelligence Matters," a job that would be quickly dubbed "The Intelligence Czar." He would serve on the White House staff and thus be out of the reach of congressional confirmation. The adviser would "communicate the president's priorities to the intelligence community" and "present to the Congress the president's views of the community's needs." Rather naively, the plan also proposes that this person "should be the community's *sole* (their emphasis) contact with the news media."

• Providing "cover" for agents overseas.

The Reagan team would also like to mobilize the entire government and business community for intelligence missions.

The new Foreign Operations Service, according to the white paper, would have at its disposal *every government agency*, and these agencies would be "required to furnish . . . full credentials, working assignments abroad for purposes of 'cover,' and full cooperation."

Meanwhile, a Reagan administration would provide private companies "immunity in connection with any lawsuits directed against them for permitting intelligence officers to use their activities as 'cover.'"

It is easy to find both potential abuses and tragedy in such an idea. First of all, it would make every Peace Corps worker a legitimate target of revolutionary groups abroad (or, for that matter, a Department of Commerce bureaucrat). Do we need another hostage situation?

Secondly, considering the Reagan team's ideas about new, domestic spying and foreign espionage programs, it makes one wonder whether terrorism directed at American businessmen abroad, already epidemic, might increase, and whether future Howard Hunts and Gordon Liddys might be able to find legal refuge under commercial cover.

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While, for now, the apprehension of my Latin American friends about the ascendancy of Bush may have been misplaced, there obviously exists in the Reagan team's white paper firm ground for their worries. Some of these Latin Americans have spouses, relatives or friends who have "disappeared" under dictatorships—in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, among others—that were helped into power by the CIA or were supported by the United States.

During the Carter administration, the United States has distanced itself somewhat from these dictatorships under the banner of the "human rights" policy. As unsatisfactory as that policy has been—to many people here as well as in Latin America—recent travels on the part of some members of the Reagan team augur worse for the future.

For example, National Public Radio reported recently that Daniel Graham, the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, visited Argentina last month and told business, political and military leaders there that the Carter human rights policy had had "disastrous effects on our relations with Latin America." Graham said that a Reagan administration would "abandon the policy of throwing old friends to the wolves." In response to accurate descriptions in the Latin American press, which covered the event heavily, that he was a Reagan adviser, Graham protested that he was just a private visitor.

Some of the "old friends" mentioned by Graham would naturally welcome a return of the Republicans and particularly Bush. The CIA gladly trained Chile's dreaded secret police, the DINA, after the United States helped put Gen. Augusto Pinochet into power, and Bush was CIA director in 1976 when DINA agents blew up Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt in a Washington car-bombing.

According to a new investigative book on the Letelier murder ("Assassination on Embassy Row," by John Dinges and Saul Landau), Bush had advance knowledge at the time of the assassination that DINA teams in the United States were up to no good but he withheld that information from FBI investigators and the U.S. prosecutor, Eugene Propper.

"Bush . . . did not say a word . . ." Dinges and Landau charge, "nor did Bush . . . or anyone else from the CIA subsequently volunteer their information about Chile's undercover mission to Propper or the FBI." The authors' conclusions are bolstered by FBI affidavits.

Instead, the newspapers were full of "CIA sources" concluding that "DINA was not involved" in the murders. Of course, FBI agents read newspapers too, and without the evidence Bush apparently kept to himself, they went chasing other wrong leads for months.

Bush has refused to comment on the matter, referring all inquiries to the CIA, which has so far refused to release such items as Bush's telephone logs on the day of the assassination. (The Reagan white paper, by the way, claims that the Freedom of Information Act has been subject to "grotesque abuse" and needs "tightening.")

In the end, however, with the Reagan team's early enthusiasm for tinhorn dictators and covert action, it may not matter much after all if Bush becomes vice president. He *would* be good at one traditional vice presidential detail, however.

Reagan could send him off to Buenos Aires, Brasilia and Santiago—as a "goodwill ambassador."

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Hugh Haynie, Louisville Courier-Journal